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THE HISTORY OF

# HESTER WILMOT;

OR, THE

## NEW GOWN :

BEING A CONTINUATION OF THE

## SUNDAY SCHOOL.

PART II.



SOLD BY HOWARD AND EVANS,

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## HESTER WILMOT, &c.

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HESTER WILMOT, I am sorry to observe, had been by nature peevish, and lazy, she would now and then slight her work, and when her mother was very unreasonable she was too apt to return her a saucy answer, but when she became acquainted with her own heart, and with the scriptures these evil tempers were in a good measure subdued for she now learnt to imitate, not her violent mother, but *him who was meek and lowly*. When she was scolded for doing ill she prayed for grace to do better; and the only answer she made to her mother's charge, "that religion only served to make people lazy," was to strive to do twice as much work, in order to prove, that it really made them diligent. The only thing in which she ventured to disobey her mother was, that when she ordered her to do week days work on a Sunday Hester cried, and said, "she did not dare disobey God," but to shew that she did not wish to save her own labour, she would do a double portion of work on the Saturday night, and rise two hours earlier on the Monday morning.

Once when she had worked very hard, her mother told her she would treat her with a holiday the following Sabbath, and take her a fine walk to eat cakes and drink ale at Weston fair, which though it was professed to be kept on the Monday

yet, to the disgrace of the village, always began on the Sunday evening\*. Rebecca, who would on no account have wasted the Monday, which was a working day in idleness, and pleasure, thought she had a very good right to enjoy herself at the fair on the Sunday evening, as well as to take her children. Hester earnestly begged to be left at home, and her mother in a rage went without her. A wet walk and more ale than she was used to drink, gave Rebecca a dangerous fever; during this illness, Hester who would not follow her to a scene of dissolute mirth, attended her night and day, and denied herself necessaries that her sick mother might have comforts. And though she secretly prayed to God that this sickness might change her mother's heart, yet she never once reproached her, or put her in mind, that it was caught by indulging in a sinful pleasure. Another Sunday night her father told Hester he thought she had been at School long enough for him to have a little good of her learning, so he desired she would stay at home and read to him. Hester cheerfully ran and fetched her Testament. But John fell a laughing, called her a fool, and said, "it would be time enough to read the Testament to him when he was going to die, but at present he must have something merry." So saying, he gave her a song-book which he had picked up at the Bell. Hester having cast her eyes

\* This practice is too common. It is much to be wished that magistrates would put a stop to it, as Mr. Simpson did at Weston, at the request of Mrs. Jones. There is another great evil worth the notice of Justices: in many villages, during the fair, ale is sold at private houses which have no licence, to the great injury of sobriety and good morals.

over it, refused to read it, saying, "she did not dare offend God by reading what would hurt her own soul." John called her a canting hypocrite, and said, he would put the Testament in the fire, for there was not a more merry girl than she was before she became religious. Her mother for once took her part, not because she thought her daughter in the right, but because she was glad of any pretence to shew her husband was in the wrong; though she herself would have abused Hester for the same thing if John had taken her part. John, with a shocking oath, abused them both, and went off in a violent passion. Hester, instead of saying one undutiful word against her father, took up a Psalter in order to teach her little sisters, but Rebecca was so provoked at her for not joining her in her abuse of her husband, that she changed her humour, said John was in the right, and Hester a perverse hypocrite, who only made religion a pretence for being undutiful to her parents. Hester bore all in silence, and committed her cause to him who judgeth righteously. It would have been a great comfort to her if she had dared to go and open her heart to Mrs. Crew, and to have joined in the religious exercises of the evening at school. But her mother refused to let her, saying, it would only harden her heart in mischief. Hester said not a word, but after having put the little ones to bed, and heard them say their prayers, out of sight, she went and sat down in her own little loft, and said to herself, "it would be pleasant to me to have taught my little sisters to read, I thought it was my duty; for David has said, *Come ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord.* It would have been still more pleasant to have passed

the evening at school, because I am still ignorant, and fitter to learn than to teach; but I cannot do either without flying in the face of my mother; God sees fit to night to change my pleasant duties into a painful trial. I give up my will, and I submit to the will of my father; but when he orders me to commit a known sin, then I dare not do it, because, in so doing, I must disobey my father which is in heaven." Now it so fell out that this dispute happened on the very Sunday next before Mrs. Jones's yearly feast. On May-day all the school attended her to church, each in a stuff gown of their own earning, and a cap and white apron of her giving. After church there was an examination made into the learning and behaviour of the school; those who were most perfect in their chapters and brought the best character for industry, humility, and sobriety, received a Bible, or some other good book.

Now Hester had been a whole year hoarding up her little savings in order to be ready with a new gown on the May-day feast. She had never got less than two shillings a week by her spinning, besides working for the family, and earning a trifle by odd jobs. This money she faithfully carried to her mother every Saturday night, keeping back, by consent, only two-pence a week towards the gown. The sum was complete, the pattern had long been settled, and Hester had only on the Monday morning to go to the shop, pay her money and bring home her gown to be made. Her mother happened to go out that morning early to iron in a gentleman's family, where she usually staid a day or two, and Hester was busy putting the house in order before she went to the shop.

On that very Monday there was to be a meeting at the Bell of all the idle fellows in the parish, John Wilmot of course was to be there. Indeed he had accepted a challenge of the Blacksmith to a batch at all fours. The Blacksmith was flush of money, John thought himself the best player; and that he might make sure of winning, he resolved to keep himself sober, which he knew was more than the other would do. John was so used to go upon tick for ale, that he got to the door of the Bell before he recollect ed that he could not keep his word with the gambler without money, and he had not a penny in his pocket, so he sullenly turned homewards. He dared not apply to his wife, as he knew he should be more likely to get a scratched face than a sixpence from her; but he knew that Hester had received two shillings for her last week's spinning on Saturday, and perhaps she might not yet have given it to her mother. Of the hoarded sum he knew nothing. He asked her if she could lend him half a crown and he would pay her next day. Hester pleased to see him in good humour after what had passed the night before, ran up and fetched down her little box, and, in the joy of her heart that he now desired something she could comply with without wounding her conscience, cheerfully poured out her whole little stock upon the table. John was in raptures at the sight of three half crowns and a sixpence, and eagerly seized it, box and all, together with a few hoarded halfpence at the bottom, though he had only asked to borrow half a crown. None but one whose heart was hardened by a long course of drunkenness could have taken away the whole, and for such a purpose. He told her she should certainly have it again next morn-

ing, and indeed intended to pay it, not doubting but he should double the sum. But John over-rated his own skill or luck, for he lost every farthing to the Blacksmith, and sneaked home before midnight, and quietly walked up to bed. He was quite sober, which Hester thought a good sign. Next morning she asked him in a very humble way for the money, which she said she would not have done, but that if the gown was not bought directly it would not be ready in time for the feast. John's conscience had troubled him a little for what he had done, for when he was not drunk he was not illnatured, and he stammered out a broken excuse, but owned he had lost the money, and had not a farthing left. The moment Hester saw him mild and kind, her heart was softened, and she begged him not to vex; adding, that she would be contented never to have a new gown as long as she lived, if she could have the comfort of always seeing him come home as sober as he was last night. For Hester did not know that he had refrained from getting drunk, only that he might gamble with a better chance of success, and that when a gamester keeps himself sober, it is not that he may practise a virtue, but that he may commit a worse crime. "I am indeed sorry for what I have done," said he, "you cannot go to the feast, and what will Madam Jones say?" "Yes, but I can, (said Hester) for God looks not at the gown, but at the heart, and I am sure he sees mine full of gratitude at hearing you talk so kindly; and if I thought my dear father would change his present evil courses, I should be the happiest girl at the feast to morrow." John walked away mournfully, and said to himself, "surely there

must be something in religion since it can thus change the heart. Hester was a pert girl, and now she is as mild as a lamb. She was an indolent girl, and now she is up with the lark. She was a vain girl, and would do any thing for a new ribbon; and now she is contented to go in rags to a feast at which every one else will have a new gown. She deprived herself of the gown to give me the money, and yet this very girl so dutiful in some things would submit to be turned out of doors rather than read a loose book at my command, or break the Sabbath. I do not understand this, there must be some mystery in it." All this he said as he was going to work. In the evening he did not go to the Bell, whether it was owing to his new thoughts or to his not having a penny in his pocket, I will not take upon me positively to say, but I believe it was a little of one and a little of the other.

As the pattern of the intended gown had long been settled in the family, and as Hester had the money by her, it was looked on as good as bought, so that she was trusted to get it brought home and made in her mother's absence. Indeed so little did Rebecca care about the school, that she would not have cared any thing about the gown, if her vanity had not made her wish that her daughter should be the best drest of any girl at the feast. Being from home, as was said before, she new nothing of the disappointment. On May-day morning Hester, instead of keeping from the feast because she had not a new gown, or meanly inventing any excuse, dressed herself out as neatly as she could in her poor old things, and went to join the school in order to go to church. Whether Hester had formerly indulged a little pride of heart, and talked of this gown ra-

ther too much, I am not quite sure, certain it is, there was a great hue and cry made at seeing Hester Wilmot, the neatest girl, the most industrious girl in the school, come to the May-day feast in an old stuff gown, when every other girl was so creditably drest. Indeed, I am sorry to say, there were two or three much too smart for their station, and who had dizened themselves out in very improper finery which Mrs Jones made them take off before her. "I mean this feast," said she, "as a reward of industry and piety, and not as a trial of skill who can be finest, and outvie the rest in show. If I do not take care my feast will become an encouragement, not to virtue, but to vanity. I am so great a friend to decency of apparel that I even like to see you deny your appetites that you may be able to come decently dressed to the house of God. To encourage you to do this, I like to set apart this one day of innocent pleasure against which you may be preparing all the year, by laying aside something every week towards buying a gown out of your little savings. But, let me tell you that, meekness and an humble spirit is of more value in the sight of God and good men than the gayest cotton gown, or the brightest pink ribbon in the parish."

Mrs. Jones, for all this, was as much surprised as the rest at Hester's mean garb: but such is the power of a good character, that she gave her credit for a right intention, especially as she knew the unhappy state of her family. For it was Mrs. Jones's way (and it is not a bad way) always to wait, and enquire into the truth, before she condemned any body of good character, though appearances were against them. "As we cannot judge of people's motives," said she, "we may from ignorance often

condemn their best actions, and approve of their worst. It will be always time enough to judge unfavourably, and let us give others credit as long as we can, and then we in our turn may expect a favourable judgment from others." Hester was no more proud of what she had done for her father than she was humbled by the meanness of her garb, and though Betty Stiles, one of the girls whose finery had been taken away, sneered at her, Hester never offered to clear herself by exposing her father, though she thought it right secretly to inform Mrs. Jones of what had past. When the examination of the girls began, Betty Stiles was asked some questions on the fourth and fifth commandments, which she answered very well. Hester was asked nearly the same questions, and though she answered them no better than Betty had done, they were all surprised to see Mrs. Jones rise up and give a handsome Bible to Hester, while she gave nothing to Betty. This girl cried out rather pertly, "Madam, it is very hard that I have no book, I was as perfect as Hester."—"I have often told you," said Mrs. Jones, "that religion is not a thing of the tongue but of the heart. That girl gives me the best proof that she has learned the fourth commandment to good purpose, who persists in keeping holy the Sabbath day, though commanded to break it by a parent whom she loves. And that girl best proves that she keeps the fifth, who gives up her own comfort and cloathing, and credit to honour and obey her father and mother, even though they are not such as she could wish. Betty Stiles, though she could answer the questions so readily, went a nutting last Sunday when she should have

been at school, and refused to nurse her sick mother when she could not help herself."

Farmer Hoskins, who stood by, whispered to Mrs. Jones, "Well, Madam, now you have convinced even me of the benefit of religious instruction, now I see there is a meaning to it. I thought it was in at one ear and out at the other, and that a song was as well as a psalm; but now I have found the proof of the pudding is in the eating, I see your scholars must *do* what they *bear*, and *obey* what they *learn*. Why, at this rate, they will all be the better servants for being really godly, and so I will add a pudding to next year's feast."

The pleasure Hester felt in receiving a new Bible, made her forget that she had on an old gown. She walked to church in a thankful frame; but how great was her joy, when she saw, among a number of working men, her own father going into church. As she past by him she cast on him a look of so much joy and affection that it brought tears into his eyes, especially when he compared her mean dress to that of the other girls, and thought who had been the cause of it. John, who had not been at church for some years, was deeply struck with the service. The confession with which it opens went to his heart. He felt, for the first time, that he was "a miserable sinner, and that there was no health in him." He now felt compunction for sin in general, though it was only his ill behaviour to his daughter which had brought him to church. The sermon was such as served to strengthen the impression which the prayers had made, and when it was over, instead of joining the ringers (for the belfry was the only part of the church John liked, because it usually led to the

alehouse) he quietly walked back to his work, was indeed the best day's work he ever made. He could not get out of his head the whole day the first words he had heard at church. "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." At night, instead of going to the Bell, he went home, intending to ask Hester to forgive him; but as soon as he got to the door, he heard Rebecca rating his daughter for having brought such a disgrace on the family as to be seen in that old rag of a gown, and insisted on knowing what she had done with the money. Hester tried to keep the secret, but her mother declared she would turn her out of doors if she did not tell the truth. Hester was at last forced to confess she had given it to her father. Unfortunately for poor John it was at this very moment he opened the door. The mother now divided her fury between her guilty husband and her innocent child, till from words she fell to blows. John defended his daughter, and received some of the strokes intended for the poor girl. This turbulent scene partly put John's good resolutions to flight, though the patience of Hester did him almost as much good as the sermon he had heard. At length the poor girl escaped upstairs not a little bruised, and a scene of much violence passed between John and Rebecca. She declared she would not sit down to supper with such a brute, and set off to neighbour's house, that she might have the pleasure of abusing him the longer. John, whose mind was much disturbed, went upstairs without his supper. As he was passing by Hester's little room he heard her voice, and as he concluded she w-

venting bitter complaints against her unnatural parents, he stopped to listen, resolving to go in and comfort her. He stopped at the door, for by the light of the moon he saw her kneeling by her bedside, and praying so earnestly that she did not hear him. As he made sure she could be praying for nothing but his death, what was his surprise to hear these words. “O Lord, have mercy upon my dear father and mother, teach me to love them, to pray for them, and to do them good, make me more dutiful and more patient, that, adorning the doctrine of God my Saviour, I may recommend his holy religion, and my dear parents may be brought to love, and fear thee.”

Poor John, who would never have been hard-hearted if he had not been a drunkard, could not stand this, he fell down on his knees, embraced his child, and begged her to teach him how to pray. He prayed himself as well as he could, and though he did not know what words to use, yet his heart was melted ; he owned he was a sinner, and begged Hester to fetch the prayer-book, and read over the confession with which he had been so struck at church. This was the pleasantest order she had ever obeyed. Seeing him deeply affected with a sense of sin, she pointed out to him the Saviour of sinners ; and in this manner she passed some hours with her father, which were the happiest of her life ; such a night was worth a hundred cotton, or even silk gowns. In the course of the week Hester read over the confession, and some other prayers, to her father, so often that he got them by heart, and repeated them while he was at work. And at length he took courage to kneel down and pray before he went to bed. From that time he

bore his wife's ill humour much better than he had ever done, and as he knew her to be neat and notable, and saving, he began to think, that if her temper was not quite so bad, his home might still become as pleasant a place to him as ever the Beck had been; but unless she became more tractable, he did not know what to do with his long evenings after the little ones were in bed, for he began one more to delight in playing with them. Hester proposed that she should teach them to read an hour every night, and he consented. Rebecca began a storm from the mere trick she had got of storming; but finding that he now brought home all his earnings, and that she got both his money and his company (for she had once loved him) she began to reconcile herself to this new way of life. In a few months John could read a psalm; in learning to read it he also got it by heart, and this proved a little store for private devotion, and while he was mowing he would call to mind a text to cheer his labor. He now went constantly to church and often dropped in at the school on a Sunday evening to hear their prayers. He expressed so much pleasure at this, that one day Hester ventured to ask him if they should set up family prayer at home. John said he should like it mighty well, but said he could not yet read quite well enough, he desired Hester to try to get a proper book and begin next Sunday night. Hester had bought of a pic Hawker for three pence the Book of Prayers, printed for the Cheap Repository, by Mr. Evans, N<sup>o</sup>. 41, and 42, Long-lane, West-smithfield, London.

When Hester read the exhortation at the beginning of this little book, her mother, who sat

the corner, and pretended to be asleep, was so much struck that she could not find a word to say against it. For a few nights, indeed, she continued to sit still, or pretended to rock the young child while her husband and daughter were kneeling at their prayers. She expected John would have scolded her for this, and so perverse was her temper, that she was disappointed at his finding no fault with her. Seeing at last that he was very patient, and that though he prayed fervently himself he suffered her to do as she liked, she lost the spirit of opposition for want of something to provoke it. As her pride began to be subdued, some little disposition of piety was awakened in her heart. By degrees she slid down on her knees, though at first it was behind the cradle, or the clock, or in some corner where she thought they would not see her. Hester rejoiced even in this outward change of her mother, and prayed that God would at last be pleased to touch her heart as he had done that of her father.

As John now spent no idle money, he had saved up a trifle by working over-hours, this he kindly offered to Hester, to make up the loss of her gown. Instead of accepting it, Hester told him, that as she herself was young and healthy, she should soon be able to clothe herself out of her own savings, and begged him to make her mother a present of this gown, which he did. It had been a maxim of Rebecca that it was better not to go to church at all than to go in an old gown. She had, however, so far conquered this evil notion, that she had lately gone pretty often. This kindness of the gown touched her not a little, and the first Sunday she put it on, Mr. Simpson happened to preach from

this text, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” This sermon so affected Rebecca that she never once thought she had her new gown on, till she came to take it off when she went to bed, and that very night instead of skulking behind, she knelt down by her husband.

There was one thing sunk deep in Rebecca's mind, she had observed, that since her husband had grown religious he had been so careful not to give her any offence, that he was become scrupulously clean; took off his dirty shoes before he sat down, and was very cautious not to spill a drop of beer on her shining table. Now it was rather remarkable, that as John grew more neat Rebecca grew more indifferent to neatness. But both these changes arose from the same cause, the growth of religion in their hearts. John grew cleanly from the fear of giving pain to his wife, while Rebecca grew indifferent from having discovered the sin and vanity of an over anxious care about trifles.

Hester continues to grow in grace and in knowledge. Last Christmas-day she was appointed an under teacher in the school, and many people think that some years hence, if any thing should happen to Mrs. Crew, Hester may be promoted to be head mistress.

Z.

THE END.